Bienvenido Bones Banez, Jr.

By Phillip Somozo

Bienvenido Bones Banez, Jr., is a Filipino surrealist painter born in Davao City in the southern island of Mindanao, the Philippines, on June 7, 1962. Having suffered from mild childhood autism and attention deficiency disorder, he became a fine example for parents with special children as he rose to comparative international prominence when he was counted in as one of early 21st century's greatest living surrealists by a man who likely qualifies as modern Surrealism's prime mover, Terrance Lindall, president and executive director of the Williamsburg Art and Historical Center in New York. That is if Lindall's knack for organizing close to 500 surrealists the world over in successive celebrations impresses you.

Family Roots

Bienvenido Bones Banez, Jr., is the son of Bienvenido Fiel Banez, Sr., a prominent lawyer during his time, whose ascendancy is traced to Don Vicente Banez of Ormoc City, Leyte. Apolonia Fiel, a lady of Spanish-Chinese ancestry (Shanghai) wed Vicente and begot Bienvenido Sr. Vicente's father was described as "Chinese-looking" and originating from the Ilocos in northern Philippines.

Ben, as Bienvenido Jr. is called for short, was born by Bienvenido Sr. to Emma Canet Bones, daughter of Andres Costa Bones of Ponteverda, Capiz, and Felisa Gomez Canet who, in turn, is the daughter of Federico Canet from Barcelona, Spain, and was raised in Bago, Negros Occidental.

Childhood

Banez finished primary school in 1975 and secondary education in 1979, both at the University of Mindanao in Davao City, during which time he already displayed drawing and painting talent. At age 11, already diagnosed with mild learning disability, he could not speak straight it took time for him to say a single word. When he spoke he would jump in extra effort to express what he meant. Because of this he attracted attention and, oftentimes, sarcastic reaction. Underestimation coming from classmates, peers, and from other people became a regular source of contention; thus, growing up as a child was not easy for him. But despite his speech defect he was a talkative child who asked about everything under the sun, says an older cousin.

Ben soon exhibited an artist's determination so firm that mockery no longer bothered him. The fountain source of his fortitude was none other than his father, Bienvenido Sr. who firmly believed his son possessed talent that could be honed into extraordinary excellence. He had credibility for saying so because he first took three years of Fine Arts before studying to become a lawyer.

After high school Ben was enrolled at The Learning Center of the Arts, Mindanao's first school of Fine Arts, also in Davao, to polish his artistic talent. The truism "Father knows best" found perfect significance between the father and son tandem under the circumstances. Bienvenido Sr. brimmed with confidence his special child will turn out to be a great artist. After all, it was from him that Ben inherited his artistic talent. He, therefore, supported his son all the way until his death in 1987 when Ben was already six feet tall.

College years

At The Learning Center of the Arts (now Ford Academy of the Arts) Ben came under the watchful eyes of national artist Victorio C. Edades, Jr. (now deceased), who, along with school president Aida Rivera-Ford, was the soul behind the establishment of the arts institution.

Edades immediately saw the student's potential. Through the motivation of the old man considered to be the Father of Modern Philippine Art, Ben, supported by private individuals and establishments, was able to hold his first solo exhibition in 1984. His classic rendition of human anatomy then became prototype for the academy.

Later, he became associate professor of Fine Arts in his college alma mater and at the Philippine Women's College-Davao which, following the success of the Ford Academy, had opened its own Fine Arts department.

The new millennium brought new tidings for Ben. He had earlier befriended the second Mindanaoan artist to win the Freeman Asian Painting Competition, Ega Carreon, also of Davao. Carreon encouraged Ben to participate in the annual competition launched by America's largest international artist community, the Vermont Studio Center based in Vermont, USA. Ben complied. After two tries he won first place in said competition and, by October 2002, flew all-expense paid to the USA for his grand prize.

America

Bienvenido Bones Banez, Jr., spent two months of artist residency at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, VT., October and November of 2002, as main part of his prize. He capped his stay there with a one-person exhibition in

the community's Red Mill Gallery. After his VSC stint, he applied for working permit and tutored special children in California. Not long after, the lure of the Mecca of Modern Art became irresistible for Banez. Thus, in 2004 he proceeded to New York.

Harsh maybe New York City is to the jobless, Ben seems to be built specifically to survive in his new environment. He still stutters with his speech but his uncanny ability to listen and get his thoughts across made people understand him, enough to establish communication and this made him socially productive. Rich Jews particularly seem to find him effective in caregiving for the old. When he is not pushing the wheelchair Ben in his basement room is busy painting canvases. This way he gets connected to the storageroom of creativity and allows a singular outflow of energy from brain to fingertips to canvases.

666 Art World

In his heart, though, Ben was yearning to meet somebody who fascinated him—a very powerful, affluent, handsome, and brilliant man. A genius. The Ideal Man. Someone so close to godly perfection that in essence he could only be the personification of the Antichrist—the ultimate Dark Angel alive in New York and waiting for Ben's arrival!

Much as fundamentalist Christians find his work offensive to good taste, they could not deny he shares them the same faith, for Ben too is a religious follower of the Christian tradition. He desired to see the Antichrist with admiration not because he is a non-believer. On contrary, it is because of his strong belief in Almighty God, as told by Judeo-Christian metanarrative, that Ben is enthralled by the Devil's rebellious power dominating over the world. Could anyone blame him for believing so?

More than everyone’s sinful guilt as proof, Ben claimed when he was younger he had been witness to a supernatural phenomenon where a possessed woman levitated from bed as Bible-bearing exorcists swarmed around in futility. Conversion that very moment became irreversible for him. The irony however was he began to see the Devil’s work all around. What his brain saw activated latent receptors through his being and expressed as forms and colors that later evolved with masterful rendition on canvases. Lucifer is real and became a spontaneous subject for his compositions.

While he had dark periods where he painted gloomily and morbidly, he gradually saw hell not as murky depth, but psychedelia—a sphere where souls are tormented in mind-bending, illusory albeit beautiful and captivating hues. With striking colors he shifts viewers’ consciousness out of the ordinary; then, as their eyes focus on details, confronts them with guilt, horror, and fear, astounding them along the process, something like a kind of astral mallet, if there were such a thing, stunned their minds. Yet, Ben, the simple man that he is, will readily pass random drug testing even if Floyd Mayweather, Jr., were the one to demand it!

Ben felt he and the Antichrist were somehow destined to meet each other in human form. Searching nooks and corners of the city, Ben one day stepped inside the Williamsburg Art and Historical Center in Brooklyn.

Ben did not meet the devil. He met Terrance Lindall

Had Surrealism founder Andre Breton attended the 2003 Brave Destiny surrealist event and the 400th birth anniversary celebration of English renaissance poet John

Milton, he would have turned-over responsibilities to the organizer of both surreal events in New York amply participated in by close to five hundred surrealists from six continents.

Terrance Lindall, the organizer, is an artist, poet, writer, and philosopher. Though not a descendant by blood, he relished Milton's Paradise Lost, considered as the greatest English poem, like no other modern-day soul did. Next to William Blake, he is author to one of the most acclaimed illustrations for the Milton classic {Elephant Folio for Paradise Lost). It therefore comes as no big surprise that the tall, lean, and intelligent man possesses the eagle eyes to see through Ben's obsession with what the Filipino termed as 666 art world, again in reference to the power of the Anti-Christ.

When a fashion photographer doing a photo-shoot in the WAH Center in Brooklyn asked permission from Lindall to use Ben's "666 Warlock Dreams" as background, Lindall commented that Banez "is the greatest living surrealist from the Philippines." The remark
was of course not a formal declaration but, afterwards, this was somehow substantiated when Ben, after having Warlock Dreams exhibited in the biggest-ever surreal art exhibition Brave Destiny in 2003, was again the only Filipino featured in Milton's biggest-ever birthday bash, the 2008 Grand Paradise Lost Costume Ball and Exhibition, also organized by Lindall with Milton's great, great grandson's presencia.

Both Brave Destiny and Grand Paradise Lost were held in the 5-storey WAH Center and participated in by hundreds of surrealist from all over the world. Lindall obviously is behind Surrealism's biggest-ever events in today's world. In 2010 Lindall expressedly honored Banez in the former's

important canvas “Pandemonium”.

SELECTED EXHIBITION:

BRAVE DESTINY 2003
Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, Brooklyn, New York, USA

WORLD’S FIRST GRAND PARADISE LOST COSTUME BALL 2008
Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, Brooklyn, New York, USA
www.wahcenter.net/exhibits/2008/milton400/

FIFTY YEARS FANTASTIC 2010
The Society for Art of Imagination
United Kingdom, London
www.facebook.com/pages/50-years-Fantastic/283998708442

SELECTED CONTEMPORARY WORKS from the PERMANENT COLLECTION
PART 2 (2002-Present)
Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, Brooklyn, New York, USA
www.wahcenter.net/exhibits/2009/collection2/

A PEACEFUL AFTERNOON: BIRTHDAY TOAST for Terrance Lindall & Yuko Nii
Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, Brooklyn, New York, USA
www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=154258231279742

AROUND THE COYOTE WINTER ARTS FESTIVAL 2003
Feb.07,2003, Chicago IL. USA

MIND'S EYE / 2007
Art and So4th present:
90 South 4th Street, Brooklyn, New York

'NAG-DILA-AB' {Flames)
Idiot Savant Artists Exhibitions
April 2001, Davao City, Mindanao,
Philippines

MILLENNIUM SUCKER-1999
IDIOT SAVANT ARTISTS
Davao City, Mindanao,Philippines

BAGOBO MYTHS & LEGEND-1989
Curated by Prof.Carlota Abellana de Pio
Central Bank Davao City, Philippines

REVIEW AND PUBLICATION:

PARADISE LOST ELEPHANT FOLIO – Terrance Lindall
(Satan gave color to the world- Bien Bones Banez)

LEXIKON-SURREAL (Gerhard Habarta)
Encyclopedia of Fantastic & Surrealistic & Symbolist & Visionary Artists 2009Internationales Archiv Fantastischer Kunstler
www.lexikon-surreal.com

WHO’S WHO in VISUAL ART 2010-2011
2010 Art Domain Whois Verlag, Leipzig
www.amazon.com/Whos-Who-Visual-Art-v-2010-2011/dp/3981347404

WHAT’S NEW IN THE SURREAL WORLD (Terrance Lindall)
Art & Antique/March 2006/
www.kellynewcomer.com/pdf/0603Surrealism_Lindall.pdf

VISIONARY ART YEARBOOK 2010-2011
By Otto Rapp
www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/1732179

‘’INDEX OF PAINTERS & SCULPTORS BIOGRAPHY & WORKS AROUND THE WORLD’’
www.settemuse.it/pittori_index/B05.html

PANANAW-2 Book of Mindanao Artists 2000
Philippine Journal of Visual Art

DAVAO HARVEST –TWO / 2008
Edited by: Ricardo M. de Ungria & Tita Lacambra Ayala
National Commission for Culture and the Arts

CROSS BREED & ÉMIGRÉ, VISUAL FLUX 2003
Documentation Project of National Commission Culture & Arts

GROUP SHOWS:

The Seed of 666 Luciferian Desire
WAH Salon Art Club
Nov.14,2010-Jan.9,2011

666 Prayer
WAH Salon Art Club
Dec.16,2007-Feb.10,2008

666 Screaming
WAH Salon Art Club
Aug.20-Oct.15,2006

Self Portrait with 666 Consternation-DNA
RED MILL GALLERY, Vermont Studio Center
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666 Golden Blasphemy
Mark Gallery/ 1993
Davao City, Philippines

OUR WORLD 666

Victoria Gallery,Victoria Plaza
Davao City, Mindanao, Philippines

MADNESS THERAPY 666
April 1984 ,Ford Academy of the Arts
Davao City, Mindanao, Philippines

Bienvenido Bones Banez. Jr's Statement and Confession
As told to Terrance Lindall
(Edited by Horace Jeffery Hodges)

"Yes! They destroyed it . . . my MASTERPIECE! They were intrigued by my great sculpture "The 666-Man's-Hero." The entire city was disturbed by both the sculpture and my hermeneutical-surrealist proclamation that "Satan gives color to the world," creating a rumor that I am the one who created the "666 Gang," or "Satanic Fraternity," in Davao City. However, in truth, so help me God, I had no idea about them or connection with them . . . I was focusing on my Art World at the Ford Academy - Fine Arts in Visual/Aesthetic and Art Philosophy. Not I, but some younger generation in Davao City was creating a 666-gangster devil's fraternity with acts of vandalism. I was totally surprised that this was happening. That was when they banned my masterpiece instead of permanently displaying it in the Ford Gallery of the Fine Arts Department at the Ford Art Academy in Davao City. Professor Aida Ford (FAA school founder) asked me to transfer my great work to another area in a province where nobody could gaze upon my great sculpture and be inspired by the great visionary rendition of Satan . . . but

eventually my sculpture was destroyed from natural weather because they left it always exposed to sunlight every day, the glorious fiery colors fading from bad weather. That's my sad story . . . but some of my fellow art professors suggested to me not to put a label or title on the work that would reveal its true meaning and not to make any statement . . . Maybe my country was not matured enough in art, aesthetics, philosophy, or a new vision conjured by revolutionary thinking. It is probably still a "third world country" that fears great ideas. Well, that's life's manifestation of becoming and actualization in God's plan for surrealist artists. In other words, it's part of our great experience to be part of naive culture both there and perhaps everywhere in the world where fear and ignorance rules."

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www.facebook.com/pages/50-years-Fantastic/283998708442

INTERNATIONAL SURREALIST SHOW 2006 / 2008
Keith Wigdor ‘Surrealism Now!!!’
New York, New York, USA
www.surrealismnow.com

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Subpages (1): Confessions of Master Revolutionary Surrealist Bienvenido Bones Banez, Jr.

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